



Washington University in St. Louis

McDONNELL INTERNATIONAL SCHOLARS ACADEMY

2023 - 2024

HIGHLIGHTS

mcdonnell.wustl.edu

Inspiring emerging leaders to address global challenges

Promoting international collaborative research



FROM OUR LEADERSHIP

Dear McDonnell Academy community:

Research shows that people with purpose are healthier and live longer, more satisfying lives. What is purpose? Purpose is defined as “the reason for which something is created, exists, or is done”. The McDonnell Scholars Academy was founded to create a network of leaders and institutions dedicated to addressing the world’s most critical challenges through education and collaborative research. It is this vision that gives us purpose - the McDonnell Academy cultivates an academically and culturally diverse community of emerging student leaders and who build strong connections through immersive, purposeful exchanges. Through our work, faculty experts in a multitude of disciplines from leading universities across the globe can unite in their research efforts to find solutions that positively impact our world. To be a part of this community is inspiring, meaningful, and serves as a frequent reminder that collectively we can make a difference in the world.

As we look back on the year, we have much to celebrate. We welcomed another diverse and talented cohort of Academy Scholars in the Fall, we celebrated the Global Incubator Seed Grant research that we have facilitated at our bi-annual Global Research Symposium, *Forces Reshaping the World*, and we took the Scholars to their first local corporate showcase with our friends at Bayer Crop Science. In addition to our leadership and communications programming, we focused this year on exploring emotional intelligence as a mechanism to create a more inclusive and bonded community. This academic year has been busy and productive, helping to advance both the mission of WashU and that of the McDonnell Academy. We look forward to continuing this great work in the coming year.

Sincerely,

Vijay Ramani
Executive Director
Vice Provost for Graduate Education

Laura C. Benoist
Director





On the first evening of the spring cohort trip to Washington, DC, McDonnell Scholars enjoy a US monuments tour.

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INTRODUCTION

Expanding Global Perspectives.
Cultivating Community.
Preparing Leaders.
Fostering Research.

The McDonnell Scholars Academy addresses the world's most complex challenges through international education and collaborative research.

As the largest international student fellowship program at Washington University in St. Louis, this distinctive program immerses talented students in transformative experiences to expand their worldview, build a culturally and academically diverse community, and prepare them to become leaders who inspire and drive effective change. By leveraging a network of leading research universities around the globe, **the McDonnell Academy is a catalyst for collaborative research across countries and disciplines.** Through seed grant initiatives, we help incubate new ideas and design solutions that positively impact our environment, our health, our societies, and the innovative technologies that are reshaping our world.

Since 2005, the McDonnell Academy has committed to building a global community at WashU and around the world. Our partnership

with departments across the university has helped attract the best and brightest students to Washington University and helped them develop the critical soft skills that make them effective global leaders. With nearly 100 Scholars on WashU's campus and 220 alumni around the world we are engaged in many sectors including education, government, industry, and health care.

In addition to McDonnell Scholar development, we have invested efforts in strategic areas important to WashU including the environment, digital transformation, global health, and social innovations. With funding from the Bethany & Bob Millard family gift, the Provost's office, and the Here and Next Strategic Planning initiative, **we have facilitated 67 seed projects with \$1.5 million in funding in more than 30 countries.** To showcase the outstanding work at WashU and by our international faculty collaborators, our bi-annual symposium focuses on disseminating the progress of these projects. With nearly 300 people in attendance, our 2023 Symposium showcased 25+ seed-funded projects.

As we enter our 20th year since inception, we look forward to continuing to facilitate student development and collaborative research in the forthcoming years.

Together, We Lead

fast facts

93 IN-RESIDENCE SCHOLARS
202 ALUMNI
70+ ACADEMIC PROGRAMS



50 INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITIES
6 CONTINENTS
7 WASHU SCHOOLS



full tuition & living stipend



annual travel grants



cultural & educational trips & events

leadership development opportunities



RESEARCH GRANTS
67 PROJECTS FUNDED

\$1.3M GRANT FUNDING AWARDED
\$12M EXTERNAL FUNDS BROUGHT IN



ROI

recruiting the best & brightest



1800 APPLICATIONS
2023-24



22 INCOMING SCHOLARS
Fall 2024

LEADERSHIP

Supporting future leaders with diverse talents through collaboration

Charting leadership paths, building connections

As McDonnell Scholars embark on their leadership journey, they begin with a retreat designed to introduce them to the Academy's culture. During this retreat, all in-residence McDonnell Scholars engage in team-building activities and networking sessions, fostering connections among peers. In their first semester, first-year Scholars participate in a leadership course where they engage with WashU and St. Louis community leaders. Through discussions on leadership styles and practical exercises in emotional intelligence and communication, Scholars begin to shape their leadership style and uncover their unique strengths, laying the foundation for success in their future endeavors.

In the Spring of 2024, McDonnell Scholars from the 2022 and 2023 cohorts visited the nation's capital to [experience Washington, D.C.'s political and cultural landscape](#), expand their professional network, and build personal connections through their shared experience.



As they engaged in friendly competitions and explored the sites of DC, bonds were formed that went beyond borders and backgrounds. Amidst laughter and thoughtful conversations, they discovered the true essence of being a McDonnell Scholar, building lifelong friendships.

Empowering contributions across fields

At the heart of the McDonnell Scholars Academy's success lies its commitment to providing Scholars with the support and resources they need to develop their leadership skills.

Through the financial support provided by the McDonnell Academy, Scholars have the opportunity to participate in research conferences with a global reach, enabling them to make meaningful contributions. [Jorge Concha and Felipe Quaassdorff's](#) participation in the McGill International Portfolio Challenge, where they presented their innovative proposal on retirement planning amidst global inflation, exemplifies this support. Earning a spot in the challenge's semifinals underscores the McDonnell Academy's commitment to facilitating Scholars' engagement in prestigious competitions and their ability to address pressing global issues.

Similarly, [Irania Santaliz Moreno's](#) presentation at the Society of Behavioral Medicine Conference, where she explored the impact of prostate cancer treatment on Black survivors' sexuality, and [Merve Illeri Tayar's](#) participation in the TeaP Conference, where she shared her research on reward-based mechanisms and reactive control, were facilitated by the McDonnell Academy's commitment to Scholars' development, allowing them to participate in conferences, share their research findings, and drive advancements in their respective fields on a global scale.

Additionally, [Isaac Che](#), from the Brown School, was awarded the esteemed Cancer Epidemiology Education in Special Populations





Be sure to visit our [Flickr page](#) for more images from McDonnell Academy events.

(CEESP) fellowship. This fellowship was secured through Isaac's successful proposal submission which was jointly funded through the McDonnell Academy and the City University of New York (CUNY). The CEESP is a NIH-funded program that aims to nurture public health students in cancer epidemiology and prevention, empowering them to combat cancer globally.

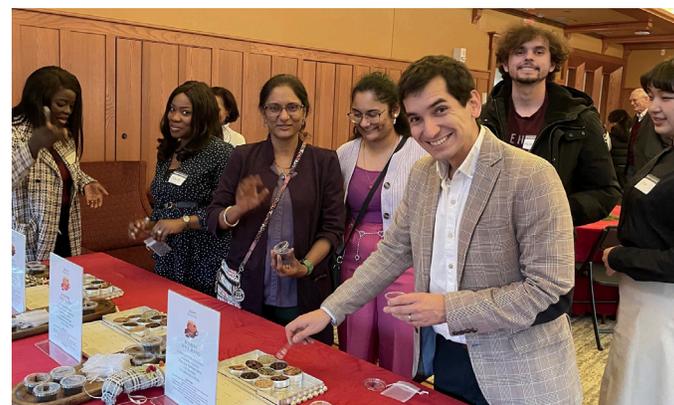
Shaping future research leaders at WashU

Allison Martinez, a biomedical engineering student, clinched second place among finalists with her research on neurovascular coupling during the 2023 She LEADS Three Minute Thesis competition. She Leads @ WashU, an annual event hosted by the Ann W. and Spencer T. Olin-Chancellor's Fellowship, has featured programming designed to empower women to lead at the highest levels of society.

Messi Lee's Outstanding Research Award at the SPS 2024 Annual Convention showcases his dedication to pushing the boundaries of knowledge in social psychology. In another area of research, Mustafa Rfat and his collaborators received an honorable mention for their groundbreaking article on refugees with disabilities, highlighting the intersection of scholarship, advocacy, and social impact.

In addition, McDonnell Scholars Charlie An and Leo Lam earned a prestigious NSF award for their innovative economic research. Investigating technology adoption's impact on economic growth dynamics, their work promises important solutions to global challenges.

These accomplishments demonstrate the exceptional abilities of WashU students and underscore the McDonnell Academy's dedication to equipping Scholars to address urgent global challenges through innovative research.



Empowering tomorrow's leaders through local industry engagement



Inspiring unconventional leadership journeys

While visiting Bayer Crop Science headquarters in St. Louis, the stories shared by the panelists, ranging from animal sciences to molecular biology, and even a transition from theater arts to medical affairs in Bayer, illustrated a compelling truth: **innovation thrives at the margins of diverse fields**. This diversity not only enriches the research and development process but also fosters a culture of adaptability and lifelong learning.

During our exclusive **Bayer Crop Science corporate showcase**, McDonnell Scholars experienced firsthand the epitome of the McDonnell Academy's three pillars: leadership, community and global mindset. Our Scholars engaged in discussions on leadership development while exploring Bayer's diverse sectors, from crop science to pharma, and consumer health; established connections within a strong scientific community; and fostered international collaboration with a global mindset while navigating the intersection of academia and industry together.

Fostering innovative leadership networks

The McDonnell Academy Panel of Scholars (MAPS) hosted an engaging industry discussion titled "Bits, Bots, and Bias: Exploring AI's Societal Influence," which delved into the multifaceted aspects of AI's impact on society. Distinguished professors from the tech industry provided expert insights, focusing on artificial intelligence development, data ethics,



and technology policy. These discussions sparked lively conversations among attendees, who had the opportunity to connect with academic leaders and professionals from diverse sectors. Panelists from St. Louis University and WashU's, Arts & Sciences, Brown School, McKelvey School of Engineering and School of Law, addressed topics such as the potential for innovation and the complexities of bias, offering attendees a comprehensive understanding of AI's significant role in shaping our world.

The MAPS, a Scholar-led initiative, work to engage the community beyond academics and skill building activities.

Assuming leadership roles within these community endeavors allow Scholars to develop personal leadership skills and styles while benefitting the entire McDonnell Academy community.

In the McDonnell Academy Connecting WashU to St. Louis & the World

Fostering global leaders & Scholars for Life

Transforming perspectives: Insights from Dr. Fernando Lopez, our 2024 Wrighton Award recipient

The Mark S. Wrighton Award for McDonnell Academy Alumni recognizes an alumnus having a significant impact on WashU, and their communities or professional career, based on their experience in the program.

Dr. Fernando Lopez, PhD'14, was the [2023 Mark S. Wrighton Award recipient](#). Lopez specializes in research on the Chilean pension system, focusing on individual choices, social legitimacy, and pension fund managers' performance. As a financial economics consultant, he brings extensive expertise to pension markets. Lopez has led studies for the Interamerican Development Bank (IADB) on strategies for boosting retirement savings and incorporating sustainability and climate change risks into pension fund investments in Latin America. He was also appointed by the Costa Rican Bureau of Pensions to enhance oversight of pension fund investments. Additionally, he has participated in discussions on pension reforms in the Chilean congress and presidential commissions of Ecuador and Uruguay.

Fernando actively engages with current McDonnell Academy Scholars, serving as a featured speaker on alumni panels and providing guidance on personal development and career direction. He shares his valuable experiences as a mentor in the Mentorship Network and participated in focus group sessions to enhance the program. Since 2015, Fernando has served as the "McDonnell Academy Envoy for Chile," contributing to recruitment efforts by organizing events and participating in online presentations and Q&A sessions. He also assists senior leadership during visits to Chile, strengthening connections between Washington University and local partners.



Lopez with McDonnell Scholars during the 2023 welcome reception.



St. Louis McDonnell Scholar alumni during the March 2024 reception.

Fueling stronger connections in St. Louis and beyond

The McDonnell Academy introduced Alumni Regional Events—a new initiative for global community engagement. This program seeks to engage the St. Louis McDonnell Academy alumni and expand professional networks.

In April 2024, we hosted a [McDonnell Academy Alumni Reception](#), a great event that brought together a wonderful group of our St. Louis alumni, along with their families. The reception facilitated the reconnection of old friends and the formation of new connections amid energetic discussions. Alumni voiced strong interest in the progress of the Academy's programming and have committed to further engagement through mentorship matching and event coordination, along with additional virtual initiatives aimed at facilitating global engagement.

COMMUNITY

Fostering a diverse network for global exchange through campus collaboration



Fifth from left, Dr. Sanjay Gupta joined McDonnell Scholars during the monthly meet-up and lunch.

BUILDING BRIDGES WITH INFLUENTIAL FIGURES

» **Distinguished WashU alum Peter Young** was welcomed to Washington University during his visit to St. Louis. At the McKelvey Reception, Scholars engaged with Young, gaining insights into his diverse network and global influence.

» **Dr. Sanjay Gupta, a multiple Emmy®-award winning chief medical correspondent for CNN** and host of the CNN podcast Chasing Life and practicing neurosurgeon, was the guest of honor at the McDonnell Academy's Monthly Meet-up in November. His visit to WashU included an Assembly Series fireside chat moderated by Dr. William Powderly, J. William Campbell Professor of Medicine and co-director of the Infectious Diseases Division at Washington University School of Medicine. During the presentation, co-sponsored by the McDonnell Academy's [Seng Teng Lee Endowed Lectureship](#), he argued that instead of relying on a full government agency, taking proactive steps, and delivering clear, unified messages to the public would be beneficial for the country's handling of public health issues.

» **Professor Deborah Terry AO, Vice-Chancellor and President of The University of Queensland**, honored the McDonnell Academy monthly meet-up event as our guest speaker. With her wealth of experience in the Australian university sector and international recognition as a scholar in psychology, President Terry engaged students in insightful discussions on the nuances of leadership.

The event highlighted the importance of building diverse networks to promote global exchange. President Terry's visit also provided an opportunity to assess the progress of the partnership between WashU and the University of Queensland. Through such collaborative efforts and global partnerships, the McDonnell Academy remains committed to developing a diverse network of leaders dedicated to promoting international exchange and fostering international collaboration.

» In the quiet setting of a local farm in Perryville, Missouri, an extraordinary event unfolded on April

8th, 2024. McDonnell Scholars, WashU faculty, McDonnell Academy collaborators, and guests of our founding benefactor **John McDonnell** and his foundation team, came together for a unique celestial phenomenon: the total solar eclipse.

Applause echoed as the moon gradually obscured the sun, leading to a collective sense of awe as darkness enveloped the landscape during the nearly four-minute totality.

Situated on a sprawling 100-acre working farm, the McDonnell Academy welcomed nearly 200 guests. The McDonnell Academy at WashU brought together students, faculty, families, and corporate guests, showcasing the power of community and shared experiences.

Diversity, wellness & collaborative dialogues

NURTURING WELLNESS AND COLLABORATION

The annual McDonnell Scholar Team-building Retreat highlighted personal wellness with guest speakers Yujia Lei, Staff Psychologist, Mental Health Services and Jenni Wang, psychologist at **Habif Health & Wellness Center**. Emphasizing mental health and wellbeing, the retreat also featured a workshop on emotional intelligence led by Dr. Hillary Anger Elfenbein, John K. Wallace, Jr. and Ellen A. Wallace Distinguished Professor and Professor of Organizational Behavior at Olin Business School.

The winter reception for the McDonnell Academy brought together various WashU graduate fellowships, including students from the **Taiwan MOE Scholarship, Olin Chancellors Fellowship, and McDonnell Academy**, to network and strengthen their connections. Festive décor and lively piano music created a warm atmosphere, while a ‘make your own chai blend’ station and self-affirmation cards offered opportunities for reflection and bonding amidst the celebration.

In the Spring, the McDonnell Academy hosted the **Cabot Zhang Endowed Lecture**, where an engaging panel explored the impact of collaboration on innovative healthcare. Zhi Min Sim, director of partnerships and strategy at Tsinghua Medicine – Tsinghua University,



along with distinguished leaders of the US China Heartland Association (USHCA) including Min Fan, executive director, and former Missouri governor Bob Holden, chairman and president, shared their insights on the future of innovative healthcare, underscoring the shared commitment to shaping the future of healthcare through collaborative initiatives.

Our Spring monthly lunch offered a personal wellness check-in with the Habif team to discuss how Scholars have utilized the valuable tools and insights from the session at our August team-building retreat. Prioritizing emotional and mental well-being is essential for our community, and we are committed to supporting continued initiatives in this area.



“In the McDonnell Academy, I developed a global mindset and a sense of social responsibility.”

Ping-I Dennis Chou
McDonnell Scholar
Energy, Environmental & Chemical
Engineering (PhD)
McKelvey School of Engineering

RESEARCH

Driving research through seed grant initiatives

Innovating together

Since 2020, the McDonnell Academy and WashU campus partners have facilitated 67 new research grants funded through the Millard Family gift, the Provost's Office, and the Here and Next Initiative, culminating in the 2023 Global Research Symposium, [Forces Reshaping the World](#). We convened WashU researchers and their international collaborators to explore pressing issues of common concern. The Symposium featured the work of seed grant awardees in areas that align with the university's *Here & Next* strategic plan: environmental research, social innovation, global health challenges, and digital transformation.

Vice Admiral Frank D. Whitworth, Director of the [National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency](#) (NGA), delivered the opening keynote address. He discussed the history and mission of the NGA, and the role of geospatial methods in understanding the "Forces Reshaping the World."

Nearly 300 attendees from Washington University, and international collaborators presented and discussed innovative research to address global challenges in the environment, social innovation, global health, and digital transformation. The insightful plenaries kept attendees engaged, curious, and eager to continue discussing the exceptional work supported by this initiative.

Students take the lead

As we gathered to explore the pressing issues reshaping our world, the McDonnell Academy invited students to be active participants in our thought-provoking plenaries, workshops and

Every modern challenge has geography at its core. Every person with a cellphone has a sense of geospatial location.

Vice Admiral Frank Whitworth
Director of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency

competitions. To highlight the talent of graduate students at WashU and international institutions, a Three Minute Thesis (3MT®) competition showcased their research and projects in the four thematic areas for a chance to win cash prizes.

Moreover, [content and narratives curated by McDonnell Scholars](#) reflected the conversations and strengthened bonds fostered during the Symposium. These reflections serve to deepen connections within the McDonnell Academy, with our partners, and throughout the WashU community.

The 2023 Global Research Symposium is a collaboration with the McDonnell International Scholars Academy, the Institute for Public Health, the Social Policy Institute, the Institute for Informatics, Data Science & Biostatistics, and the Office of the Provost at Washington University.

Right: More images from the Global Research Symposium are available on Flickr.

2023 Global Research Symposium



 **300**
ATTENDEES

 **25+**
PRESENTATIONS

featuring
research from

 **45+**
COLLABORATORS

across

 **16**
COUNTRIES/
REGIONS

and

 **18**
INTERNATIONAL
INSTITUTIONS

SAVE THE DATE
OCTOBER 2-4
2025

**2025 GLOBAL RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM &
MCDONNELL SCHOLARS ACADEMY
20th ANNIVERSARY AT WASHU**



The McDonnell Academy's Global Seed Grants initiative has helped WashU faculty secure more than \$12M in external funding from sources like NIH, Gates Foundation and NSF. We have proved that seed grant funding works to increase global collaboration and bring new research to the world.

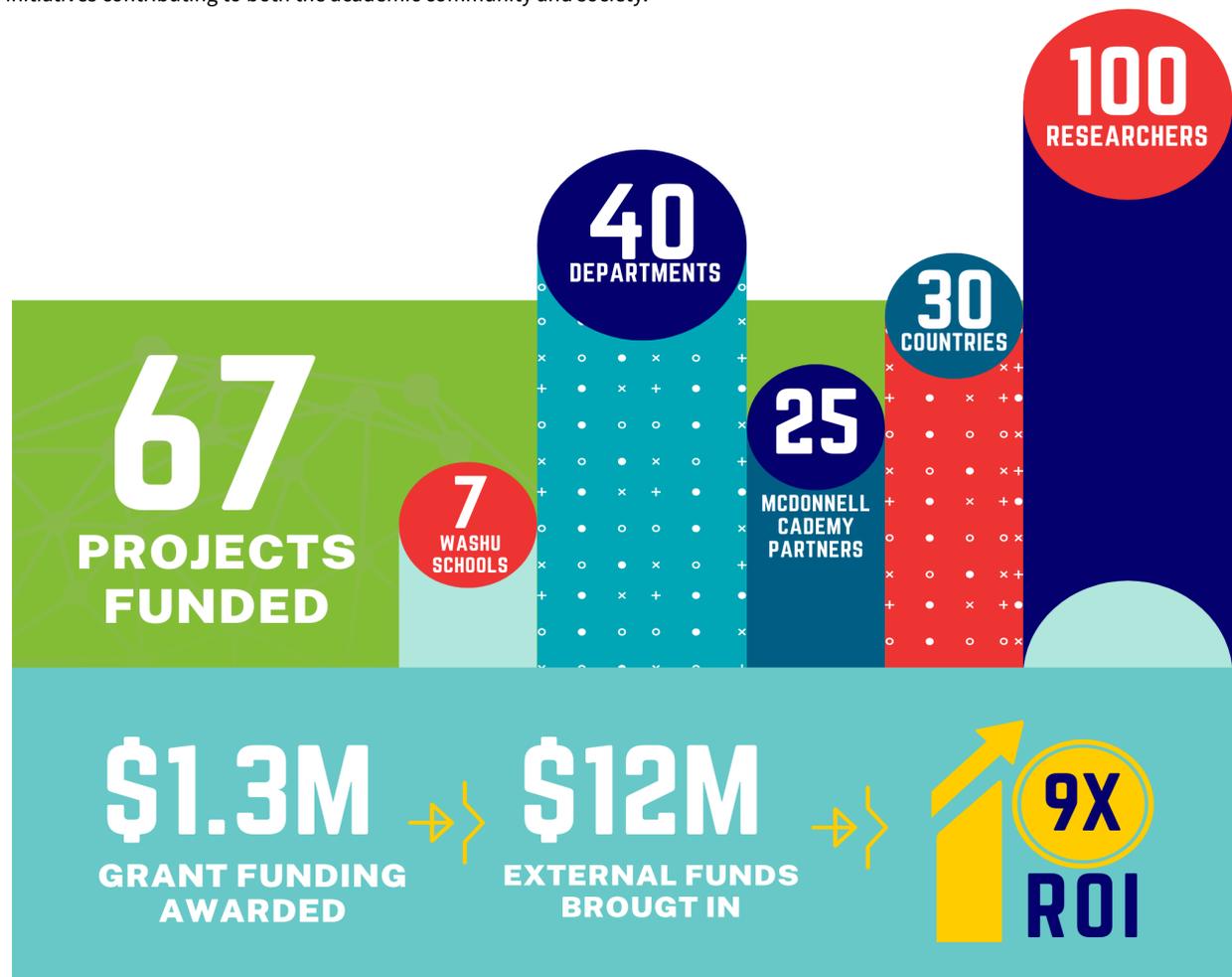
**Laura Benoist, Director
McDonnell Scholars Academy**

Research, Collaboration & Engagement

A story of momentum

The McDonnell International Scholars Academy is a catalyst for collaborative research, leveraging the power of its global network to advance research across disciplines and countries.

This year, we expanded our seed grant initiative by integrating the [McDonnell Academy Global Accelerator Grant](#), enhancing opportunities for research endeavors gaining momentum. This support nurtures initial ideas, ensures preliminary data collection, and propels projects to advance human health and humanity. Collaboratively with the Office of the Provost, this year's enrichment aligns with the "Here & Next" Strategic Plan priorities, and highlights support for initiatives contributing to both the academic community and society.



 Washington University in St. Louis
MCDONNELL INTERNATIONAL SCHOLARS ACADEMY

GLOBAL INCUBATOR SEED GRANTS

Stimulating high-impact research

*You can make great impact,
but even greater impact
when you work with people
in the other fields.*

– Prof. Jr-Shin Li

Newton R. and Sarah Louisa Glasgow Wilson
Professor of Engineering
Washington University in St. Louis



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Join the chat with our international community



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Connect with WashU via the head of WUSTL China office

Together, We Lead

The mission of Washington University in St. Louis is to act in service of truth through the formation of leaders, the discovery of knowledge, and the treatment of patients for the betterment of our region, our nation, and our world.

For nearly 20 years, the McDonnell Scholars Academy has a dual mission. First, we recruit top scholars from partner universities—the U.S. and international universities across the globe—and mentor them as they pursue graduate and professional degrees at Washington University, preparing them to become future global leaders. Second, we leverage the Academy's global network to incubate new ideas and foster collaborative research across countries and disciplines.

The three pillars of the McDonnell Scholars program – global mindset, leadership, and community are the foundation for a promising future and guide us in shaping the development of our McDonnell Scholars. The McDonnell Academy seeks to be a place where collaborative research across countries and disciplines is cultivated and connections are deepened through the work we accomplish.

The correlation between the McDonnell Academy and WashU's strategic plan, **Here and Next**, underscores WashU's dedication to nurturing people, community, and research, showcasing our focus on leadership and collaboration, all within the context of embracing the global landscape.

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